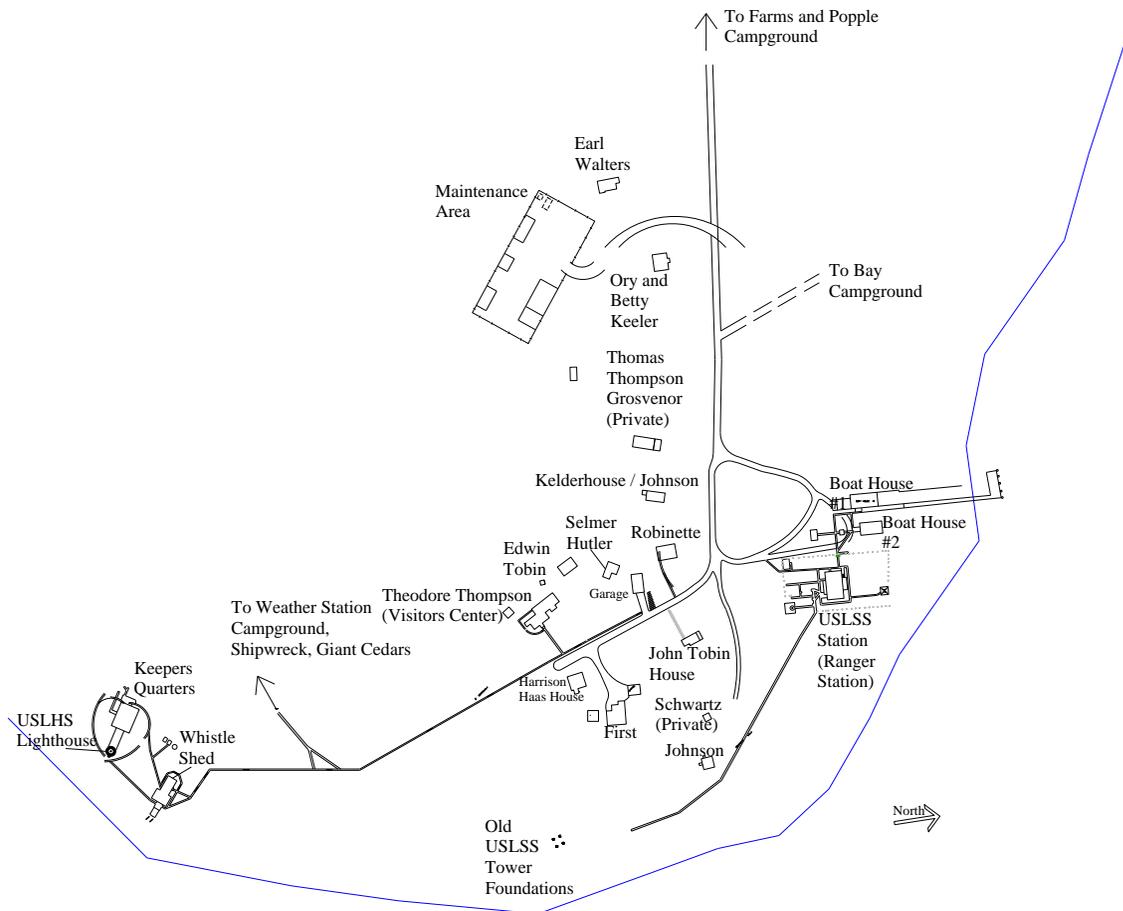


# South Manitou Island Village Visitor Guide

Sleeping Bear Dunes  
National Lakeshore  
Michigan



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Welcome to South Manitou Island! As you leave the boat and walk down the dock toward the village, the first building you see is the **U.S. Life-Saving Service (USLSS) Boathouse** at the end of the dock. If you are camping on the island, this is where you will have your orientation. Take a moment to visit the boathouse and see one of the original surfboats that was used by the USLSS here on South Manitou Island. You will see the carriage and rails that were used to launch the boat and some of the other equipment as well. On your left, right next to the main boathouse is another smaller boathouse, which was also used by the USLSS to store their boats and equipment. The USLSS was the predecessor of the US Coast Guard responsible for saving lives of passengers and crew of ships in distress.

To the left of the smaller boathouse is the **USLSS Dwelling and Office**, which is now used as the National Park Service Ranger Station on the island. This is a nice spot for a picnic lunch after your boat ride and before heading off to explore the rest of the island. Water and flush toilets are available just behind the boathouses.



SMI USLSS and NPS Ranger Station 2007

South Manitou Island (SMI) was first settled by William Burton and his family, originally from Vermont. They arrived around 1835 and by 1838 Burton had built a house and steamboat landing where he provided cord wood to fuel the steamers. The dock and early village was located in the middle of the bay on the east side of the island. Just walk down the beach to where it meets Chicago Road. A few pilings are still visible near the shore.

In 1847, the village had a blacksmith shop, grocery store, and a barn. There was a wooden tamarack railroad track extending inland 3-4 miles with branches for hauling cord wood to the dock. Not much of the original village remains except for the ruin of the general store and a few graves of early settlers and sailors. Walk around the area and imagine living in this bustling little logging village. Stop at the Island Visitor Center to see photos of this period.

The old dock was in the perfect location to supply the steamers. It provided a safe, deep water harbor, and ships would arrive regularly to take on fuel, lumber, and fresh food. As the commercial steamers began converting to coal, the boat traffic diminished and the main activities on the island shifted from logging to agriculture and government operations. The US Life-Saving Service and lighthouse facilities were built on the southern part of the harbor in a location that would allow easy embarking/disembarking of rescue boats and proximity to views of the most dangerous parts of the Manitou Passage.

The USLSS and lighthouse facilities were designed to be self-sufficient. The village developed around 1902 as servicemen and their families moved to the island. Eventually, logging operations slowed and the main dock fell into disrepair. Residents of the original village either left for the mainland or moved to the current site of the SMI village. Most of the houses in the village were built or moved to this location between 1908 and 1920. Many of the houses in the village are used for NPS staff and volunteer housing during the summer. **Please respect their privacy.** As you walk down the path through the village, the last house on the right was originally built by Thomas Thompson, and in 1923 when the old dock closed down, James and Lillian Burdick moved their general store from

the old dock to this house. It became the main general store and post office for the island. Now it is the Visitor Center, so be sure to go in and explore the house and look over the photos and artifacts of island life.



Harrison Haas house built in 1916 from a Wardway Kit



SMI Visitor Center and former general store & post office.

Across the road from the Visitor Center is the Harrison Haas (pronounced “Haze”) house. Haas built this house in 1916 from a Montgomery Ward Kit (Wardway Homes). During renovations of the house, some of the trim and other parts of the house were labeled with shipping and construction information, it was clear that the house was shipped in at least two different shipments. Several houses on South Manitou Island and North Manitou Island were kit homes from either Montgomery Ward or Sears. During the period of 1908 to 1940, about 100,000 kit homes were built in the U.S.



Lighthouse complex – Fog Signal building on left, small cylindrical building in the center is the flammable storage building.



Keeper's Quarters, walkway to lighthouse and 1871 Lighthouse tower.

Follow the boardwalk to the Lighthouse complex. Along the way, you will learn about the Three Brothers ship that sunk here in 1911. The first lighthouse on the island was built in 1839 with subsequent lighthouses built in 1858 and 1871. The present lighthouse served Lake Michigan shipping through the Manitou Passage for over 100 years. The tower is one of the identifying landmarks of the island. Towers in this class, designed by Army-trained engineer Orlando Poe, are considered among the most graceful and beautiful ever built. The white structure is visible from the mainland on a clear day and stands as a symbol of the island's rich heritage. Be sure to climb the spiral staircase to the top of the tower for a great view!

The keeper's quarters, connected to the tower by a covered passageway, was built in 1858 to replace the original 1839 lighthouse. The building once served as both lighthouse and keeper's residence with the tower built on the roof nearest the shore. After the present lighthouse was built in 1871, the light tower on the keeper's quarters was removed. The beams and some of the old stairways to the light tower still exist. In 1875 a fog signal was added to the site. For many years, the light was equipped with a three-wick kerosene lantern within a third-order Fresnel lens system. On a clear night it was visible at Point Betsie about 20 miles south.

The small red circular steel building provided safe storage for the kerosene and other flammables. The small building near the beach to the left of the Flammable Storage building is the Fog Signal Building. It was outfitted with a boiler fired by coal or wood. The steam was piped to a 10-inch locomotive whistle located at the top of the tower. You can view the original whistle at the Visitor Center. Before the steam whistle was built, a fog bell was used, which was left standing at the rear of the keeper's quarters to serve as an emergency back-up in case the steam whistle failed. The fog bell no longer exists. Think about all the noise! On a foggy night, there was little sleep in the village!

If you have time, go back to the Ranger Station and find the small sidewalk that led from the USLSS Station to the old watch tower. The narrow cement sidewalk runs parallel to the beach and ends in the sand near two large concrete pilings that were part of the foundation for the watchtower. Imagine being on watch and walking down this narrow walkway to the watchtower. It was a life that we can only dream about. At the end of the walk is a large braided cable. This is the original telephone cable that ran under the lake to connect the watch towers of the 3 USLSS stations in the Manitou Passage: South Manitou Island, North Manitou Island, and Sleeping Bear Point.

Enjoy your visit to South Manitou Island. Come back and visit again. You may also want to visit other historical areas of Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore whose histories are tied to South Manitou Island. The Maritime Museum at Glen Haven is a restored USLSS station which provides many more details about the US Life-Saving Service. The village of Glen Haven itself is a restored logging village with a working blacksmith shop, general store, and boat museum.